The Labrador Mission

Several attempts were made to plant Christianity in Labrador before any prospect appeared that these attempts would be successful. The first effort was made by some Moravians in London in company with several merchants who fitted out a vessel to trade on the coast of Labrador. They applied to Count Zinzendorf for missionaries. Accordingly in May 1752 four missionaries sailed in this ship, together with Christian Erhard a Dutch mate who previously to this had been on the whale fishery in Davis' Straits. They took various articles which were necessary to further their design. They immediately commenced a settlement. Erhard, in the mean time, went northwardly with the ship, but the Esquimaux being alarmed at the guns of the ship, would not come on board. This induced Erhard to go on shore, with five other men, but they never returned. There is a suspicion that they were murdered by the Savages. When the Ship returned to the Missionaries, the Capn represented to them the loss he had sustained in Erhard and his companions. The Missionaries agreed to return home, to assist in the management of the vessel. This circumstance led to the abandonment of the Mission for the present*.

* Crantz's Hist of the United Brethren

In 64 Jens Haven, a missionary of Greenland, was desirous of renewing the attempt of diffusing the light of the gospel among the Esquimaux - with this view he went to England, and by the assistance of the Brethren succeeded in obtaining her Majesty's permission for a settlement on the Labrador Coast, under the patronage of Sir Hugh Pallisser the governor of that country and of the neighbouring island of Newfoundland - He entered on this difficult enterprise that very season, and after landing in various places, he at length discovered a number of Esquimaux on the island of Quirpon, on the N.E point of N. Foundland - From the resemblance of their language to that of Greenland, he spoke to them, at which they were much surprised. He told that his object was to reveal to them the true God and the way in which they might go to Heaven - after remaining here a few days and receiving the kindest treatment he left them, promising to return the following year -

This Kindness shewn to Haven was very pleasing to G. Pallider - The following year this active missionary returned, accompanied by two or three of the Brethren - They penetrated into the interiour of the country, and when they returned to the Ship they found several hundreds of the Esquimaux to whom they preached for some weeks But notwithstanding these promising events, it was found necessary to suspend the mission entirely, which was not renewed til the year 70 -

An important circumstance now took place - The well known Esquimaux woman, Nukak was carried from Labrador to London - She finding that Jens Haven could speak her language, earnestly implored him to return and help her countrymen She attracted great notice from persons of wealth and influence and her solicitations in behalf of the Mission were not unavailing - The Privy council issued a grant to the Brethren, giving them leave to form settlements and preach the gospel among the Esquimaux - Some B. in London also feeling a lively interest in the Mission purchased a vessel not only to convey the missionaries but to supply them annually with provisions -

In 70 Jens Haven accompanied by Christian Drachart, who had belonged for many years to the Danish mission in Greenland, and Stephen Jensen sailed for the coast of Labrador. They explored the country to find a suitable place for settlement - They at last fixed upon the place called Nain, and after purchasing the land they returned to London, to make final arrangements for settling in the country - From 71. to 74. nothing remarkable - but in 74. Haven received a commission to go with three of the Brethren and explore the coast to the Northward of Nain - Serious disasters now befell them on their return the vessel was wrecked two of the Brethren drowned - about two years after this, having purchased land about 150 miles to the Northward, made a new settlement which was named Okkak. Hitherto these Zealous missionaries had discovered no visible good arising from their labours, but after labouring several years in this place, conflicting with the

most unnumbered difficulties they had the
satisfaction of finding that some of Esquimaux
felt the power of Truth on their Hearts
tho I have been utterly unable to find any
statement of the manner in which they were
affected by the Preaching of the word ~
whether they felt deep convictions of sin I
am unable to say It is probable however
that they were considerably affected in this
way, since their walk appears to have
been humble and consistent

In March 1782 - a circumstance occurred which
calls us, to admire the Providence of God
and the guardianship which he exercises
over the children of his grace - Samuel
Liebisch one of the Miss - in the discharge of
his duties as general superintendant of the
settlements was obliged to leave Nain
for Okkak - He was accompanied by W.
Turner a Brother Missionary ~ They set off on
their journey early in the morning in a sledge
driven by one of the Baptised Esq - They were
joined by another sledge of Esquimaux the whole
company amounting to 5 men one woman
and a child ~

The weather was inviting and they travelled with such rapidity that they expected to reach Ohkak in a very short time - after travelling for some time at a considerable distance from the shore, in order to avail themselves of the smoothness of the ice - they received intimations from some Esquimaux, who met them, that they had better return - after a while their own Esquimaux intimated that there was some apprehension of a ground swell - The sky however appearing clear, and the hig. sus- pecting the motives of the Es. thought it best to persevere - as soon however as the sun declined the wind was suddenly raised to a storm - the snow was driven about with violence, both on the ice, and from the summits of the mountains - The ground swell became awfully alarming - The sledges at times seemed to ascend a rising hill, the whole body of ice being perfectly in an undulating motion, and the bursting of the ice, at a distance, very much resem- bled the report of cannon.

our wanderers drove in haste to the shore but, as they approached it the prospect before them was awfully tremendous. for scarcely had they reached it, when that part of the ice from which they had just escaped burst asunder, and the water rushing up from beneath instantly precipitated it into the ocean - In a moment as if by a signal the whole mass of ice for several miles along the coast, and extending as far as the eye could reach, began to break and be overwhelmed by the waves - The spectacle, says our Historian was tremendous and awfully grand - The immense fields of ice, rising out of the ocean, clashing against each other, and then plunging into the deep with a violence which no language can express and a noise like the discharge of a thousand cannon, was a sight which must have struck the most unreflecting mind with amazement the B. were overwhelmed. with gratitude for their deliverance and even the Esquimaux expressed gratitude to God -

The Esquimaux now began to build a snow house, and about 9 o'clock at night all of them crept into it grateful even for such a refuge. The whole company now took supper and after singing a hymn, they lay down to rest. But the brethren were unable to compose their minds tranquilly as they did their late miraculous escape. Had it not been for this wakefulness in the Missionaries, the whole party would probably have met with instant death. About 2 o'clock in the morning Liebisch perceived some drops of salt water fall from the roof the snow house on his lips. At first he was alarmed yet he lay quiet till the dropping became more frequent. He soon however gave the alarm by calling to the Party all of whom immediately rose. One of the Esquimaux with a large knife cut a passage thro the side of the house They all retreated to a neighbouring eminence; but scarcely had they reached it, when an tremendous wave carried away the whole house

The situation of our Missionaries was now uncomfortable beyond description — They had scarcely any provisions — as there was no prospect of speedily reaching the abodes of men, they were obliged to divide their little stock of provisions — There were but two ways in which they could extricate themselves, either by going across the bleak mountain Kiglakeit, or wait for a new retract — Whilst the Miss. were in this situation — the Brethren at Nain and the wives of the Miss. were in a state of apprehension — The Esquimaux who had not them, threw out hints of their destruction and warned them of the ground under Samuel and William will return no more to Nain said they — Not return replied the wives of the Miss — What makes you say so — S and W. are no more, replied the E. All their bones are broken and in the stomachs of the Sharks — The B. were now in the utmost distress. There was no prospect that the sea would freeze, they were straitened for the necessaries of Life and the weather was so mild, that the snow house began to melt —

unexpectedly, however the sea began to freeze - and soon acquired solidity - The E now began to pursue their journey to okkak, while the B. after staying six days in this miserable place set off for Nain - Their driver ran all the way round the mountain of Kiglapeit, before the sledge to find a track - They soon reached the bay and were out of danger - Here they made a meal of the fragments of their provisions - about 12 oclock at night they reached Nain to the great joy of the settlement -

Soon after this another settlement was commenced by the B at a place which they called Hopedale to the South of Nain - But for some years after the establishment of this settlement a number of the baptised E were seduced to the South where they purchased firearms associated with the Heathen and plunged themselves into the most deplorable situation - This circumstance proved deeply unfavourable to the Mission - Some of the Baptised too, at the apprehension of death, sought relief in the practice of Sorcerers -

These people dread death very much but they are more resigned at its approach

The B. now received into fellowship a man called Tuglaruna, a great man among the E. He had formerly been baptised by a Presbyterian in Chateau Bay during a dangerous illness - Being a sorcerer he had great influence among the E - He was guilty of several murders by his own hand and many more by his reading ~~the~~ & others to put to death men, who he said ought not to live Being frequently reproved by the B. he would weep bitterly for his sins but he would say that the Devil forced him to it - He at length however became attentive to the gospel and gave sincere proofs of conversion and he at last died in hope Dec
In 1800 one of the Mg. Remain by name went out from Hopedale to procure fresh provisions but never returned - In vain the B. searched in every direction - Their loss was deeply felt -
In 1803 a revival began at Hopedale which extended its influence to Okkak and Nain many who had hitherto been indifferent about their souls, were now awakened as from sleep among the baptised & so there appeared much of the power of religion - This has continued

1812 the numbers were as follows -

Nain - Bat and candidates 88 Communicants 25

Okkak 116 - 0

Hopedale 88 - 31 -

a Spelling book, Catechism, Hymn book and a Harmony of the four gospels in the Es language have been published by the B. of late they have undertaken a translation of the Whole N. T. When the gospel of John was distributed among them, it was received with the most lively joy - Some burst into tears, some kissed it to their bosoms, some expressed their gratitude by letters addressed to the Soc - They take it with them when they go after provisions and make their evenings in their tents or snow houses, reading it with great delight - Truly this is the Lords doings and marvellous in our eyes - Later than 1812 we have no regular account of this mission - We shall therefore close the Report by a short extract from the twelfth Report of the B and F Bible Society - The Intelligence from L says the report is calculated to awaken peculiar interest - In 1814 the three Gospels of M. M and L were solemnly distributed by the schools among those of the Es who could read well of whom the number is considerable and were received with gratitude - among the evidences of this assertion it may be mentioned that letters have been received from 2 young Es females expressing their thanks - It cannot but rejoice the members of the British

and B. S. to have been instrumental in bringing this remote people within the pale of the glorious gospel of salvation